

Reviews from: PSLA Conference, 2011.

Best of the Best of Children's Literature for 2010.

Presented: Thursday, April 28, 2011: (W3)

Best of the Best Committee:

Julie Tomer and Linda Mullen, Co-Chairs

Kelly Grimmer, Martha Lambertsen, Diana Lamey, Lynne Rudolph; and Martha Trzepacz

#1 *Me and You.* Browne, Anthony.

Anthony Browne's retelling of Goldilocks titled *Me and You* uses color or lack of to dramatize differences between the haves and have-nots. It is a modern version with an urban setting told in first person by baby bear. The story of the comfortably situated bears is illustrated with full-page pastels on the right-hand side and is told in text. Goldilocks, although she is only referred to as "the girl," is featured on the wordless left-hand side usually in small sepia-toned pictures suggesting photos. She is depicted as a waif who lives in a deprived area and is shown walking to market with her mother when she is distracted by a balloon. She chases it through scary inner city streets becoming separated from her mother and is soon hopelessly lost. Meanwhile, on the right is the usual story of the three bears who decide to go for a walk in the park while their porridge cools. When the little girl sees the bears' house, it is shown in color; succeeding pictures on the left show her sampling the porridge, trying out the chairs, going up the stairs, and finally settling into little bear's bed in a full-page illustration. After the usual discovery, wake-up, and escape, Little Bear wonders "what happened to her?" Again, sepia snapshots show the little girl running through the streets until she is reunited with her mother. Children who have heard the traditional story will be especially interested in this new version which uses color and a familiar folktale to show contrasting lifestyles. Use with older students to show variations in storytelling. (DL)

#2 *Bink & Gollie,* DiCamillo, Kate and McGhee, Alison.

Bink & Gollie written by both Kate DiCamillo and Alison McGhee and delightfully animated with illustrations by Tony Fucile is written in three semi connected imaginative short stories. Each story is told through a lively dialog between two friends, tall, elegant, articulate Gollie, drolly responding to the short enthusiastic comments made by tiny energetic spikey haired Bink.

Although this book is filled with whimsical expressive cartoons and could be considered a combination of a graphic novel and early chapter book (it won the Geisel Award for beginning readers this year), the vocabulary and the story are sophisticated and will be appreciated more by children in second through fourth grade. This would also make an entertaining title to enjoy with a reading partner or a parent. (ML)

#3 *Clever Jack Takes the Cake.* Fleming, Candace. Illustrated. by Karas, G. Brian.

Jack, a poor boy, receives an invitation to the Princess's birthday party. His mother says, "What a shame you can't go. We've nothing fine enough to give her...and no money to buy a gift." But Jack has an idea. He'll bake a cake. He trades his ax for some sugar and flour, gets some eggs and milk from his animals, gathers walnuts, dips his own candles and finds the reddest, juiciest strawberry in the land. He makes a

wonderful cake and sets off for the party. Along the way, he meets 4 and 20 blackbirds who eat the walnuts, a troll who demands part of the cake, a dark wood, where he uses up all his candles, and a dancing bear who eats the rest of the cake. By the time he gets to the princess, he has nothing to offer her except a story of his travels. Jack's story turns out to be, in the words of the princess, "a fine gift."

Clever Jack Takes the Cake is a wonderful original fairytale with an exceptionally likeable character in Jack. Jack embodies all the qualities you want in your fairytale heroes. Each time he meets with a problem, he is undeterred. We already know he's clever from the title of the book, but we learn he's also resilient, flexible and brave with a good sense of humor. We want Jack to succeed and kids will cheer when he does. The expressive and humorous illustrations by G. Brian Karas complement the text beautifully and serve to reinforce what we know about Jack. The story makes a great read-aloud and can prompt discussions on character, values or storytelling. (LM)

#4 *April and Esme, Tooth Fairies.* Graham, Bob

Lost teeth and tooth fairies are high interest subjects for first graders. As I read *April and Esme: Tooth Fairies* written and illustrated by Australian, Bob Graham, the students eyes were riveted to the whimsical pictures depicting the tooth fairy family and their home- especially their bathroom. The class thoroughly enjoyed the story of 6-year-old Esme and her older 7-year-old sister April making their first tooth fairy trip together, because a human grandmother called Esme on her cell phone requesting their services.

As you read these stories, be prepared for a grinning audience with their hands in their mouths diligently wiggling their teeth. This read aloud is a real crowd pleaser for kindergarten through 2nd grade. (ML)

#5 *Dave The Potter : Artist, Poet, Slave* by Laban Carrick Hill, illustrated by Bryan Collier.

Dave, a 19th century southern slave created magnificent pottery jars. On many of his pieces he wrote poetic verses describing his thoughts and events in his life. Impressive illustrations and background material enhance the narrative.

The author's story behind this book is just as intriguing as the book itself. It's poetry, it's history and a bit of Americana. A "must" for any library. (MT)

#6 *How To Clean A Hippopotamus: A Look At Unusual Animal Partnerships.* Jenkins, Steve and Page, Robin.

Why does a giraffe let an oxpecker climb into its ear? This is one of five questions at the start of this exciting book about animal symbiosis. Three types of symbiosis are explored here—mutualism, parasitism, and commensualism. In graphic novel style Jenkins employs his signature cut and torn paper collage, in eye popping color, on vibrant backgrounds to introduce young readers to this scientific concept. The text is straight forward--much factual information is presented here...perhaps too much. The spreads are quite busy - Kirkus Review (who did not give it a star...and they star everything!) states, "Fewer examples per page would have allowed a more spacious design with larger illustrations and fewer text boxes, which would have benefited the intended audience." I whole-heartedly agree. That's not to say that I wouldn't buy it for my collection...if I had one, and I am delighted to now own it for my grandchildren.

It will serve as a browser for some; provide teachers with unusual examples of symbiosis for sparking discussion and interest. It is suitable for first researchers, and is a fascinating glimpse into the natural world of wonders for young children.

Back matter briefly explains the three types of symbiosis, and provides supplementary information about size, habitat and diet for each of the 54 animals covered. Additional titles are also recommended.

(Aside from the clutter) This is another superb offering from a brilliantly talented and obviously symbiotic couple. (LR)

#7 *Big Red Lollipop.* Khan, Rukhsana, illustrated by Sophie Blackall.

It seems that sibling rivalry is much the same the world over. Khan is of Pakistani descent, and states that the story is based upon an incident from her own childhood.

Rubina is happily invited to a classmate's birthday party. Cultures clash as her mother, Ami, insists that she take along her little sister, Sana. This proves to be a disaster, and Rubina does not get any more invitations. To add insult to injury Sana eats Rubina's big red lollipop. Turn-about is fair play, so when Sana gets an invitation, Ami insists that she take both of her sisters-younger and older. Rubina "turns her experience into wisdom" (as PW states) and convinces Ami to let Sana go alone. Upon her return Sana brings her big sister the big green lollipop from her goody bag.

The illustrations carry the story here. They are done in ink and watercolor with lots of clean space. Blackall uses soft, muted tones, incorporates the patterns and designs of Pakistan, crafts expressive faces, captures body language, and creates wonderful perspective.

The book could be used to discuss sibling issues, birthday traditions and cultural differences and similarities the world over. It could be used in studying maps (two aerial scenes are terrific) or artistic perspective (the musical chairs page and the bed-time page are great examples). (LR)

#8 *Ling & Ting: Not Exactly the Same!* Lin, Grace.

With the increase of twins entering our schools, it is a relief to find an award winning early chapter book written about them. *Ling & Ting: Not Exactly the Same!* written and beautifully illustrated with bold, vivid colors painted in gouache and ink by Grace Lin, contains six delightful tales about Chinese American twin sisters Ling & Ting. They look exactly alike until a haircut fiasco, but they have very different personalities.

The first and second grade students love the beautifully rendered illustrations and easy yet cleverly written stories. This story would fit comfortably in first grade units on both families and friendship. For more easy to read and entertaining chapter books about Chinese American girls, try Fran Manushkin's new Katie Woo series, also about navigating friendships and full of attractive illustrations of a variety of multi-cultural children.

Ling & Ting: Not Exactly the Same! is a perfect choice for an early chapter book reader in kindergarten to second grade, hopefully sequels will follow. (ML)

#9. *Nini Lost and Found.* Lobel, Anita.

I love Anita Lobel's artwork, so I wanted to review this book. After a fairly cursory reading, my impression was that it was beautifully illustrated with a somewhat bland story. I decided to read it to my kindergarten classes to see what they thought. They loved it and now I think I see why. Nini,

Lost and Found is an adventure story. Nini, an inside cat runs out the door. At first, she's enjoying the new sights, sounds and smells, but then night falls and she feels threatened by the animals in the woods.

Nini is truly the "star" of this story. The first thing my kindergarteners noticed was all the cat images in Nini's house. Cat pictures on the walls and pillows, cat books. It's as if it is Nini's house. In other words, this world revolves around Nini just as my students' worlds (and all young childrens' worlds) revolve around them. Nini compares the joys of being in her cozy house—the warmth of the fireplace, the soft couch, the tickle of yarn--with the thrill of the new. She has decisions to make. In this seemingly simple and sweet story, there are a number of dichotomies that are examined: the comfort of family vs. the outside world; safety vs. danger; bravery vs. cowardice and action vs. inaction. The story presents kids with a lot to think about and a lot to identify with.

The book itself is beautiful, big with large print. The illustrations are colorful and textured. In sum, a perfect book for Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 1. (LM)

#10 *Pocket Full Of Posies: A Treasury Of Nursery Rhymes.* Mavor, Salley.

Sixty-four nursery rhymes are presented here—a few obscure, most traditional. But, it is the illustrations that captivate here. Mavor, who has been sewing since childhood, has crafted an intricate world of nursery rhyme characters, in jewel toned settings that are quite remarkable and beautifully unique. She uses a variety of needlework techniques (needlepoint, embroidery), along with found objects (buttons, acorn tops, twigs) to create amazing scenes for each rhyme - all sewn by hand onto dyed wool felt and reproduced here. Most are single page spreads, some with more than one rhyme to a page. But a few spread out over the double page with loosely themed rhymes.

The rain scene is wonderful and includes "Rain, rain, go away, along with two additional rhymes. Jack and Jill spreads out over the double-page and includes all four verses.

This is a book to be poured over by parent and child, grandparent and grandchild, a book that will make a perfect new baby gift. In a school setting it could certainly be used in the pre-school or Kindergarten, as well the art room, the music room, and, of course, the library. This little treasury could single-handedly create a resurgence of interest in nursery rhymes. I hope so! (LR)

#11 *Snook Alone.* Nelson, Marilyn. Illustrated by Timothy Basil Ering.

Snook Alone is the story of a rat terrier living with a naturalist monk in a hermitage on an "island in a faraway sea". Snook is enjoying his spare, but wonderful life beside the working and praying monk. Snook's job is to get rid of the rats and mice while Abba Jacob gardens and tends to other chores. Theirs is an unbreakable bond and they are practically inseparable until the day they are separated by a storm and Snook is abandoned on a small island.

I tried to love this book. I opened it up and immediately fell in love with the drawings of the energetic dog and his comical-looking monk friend. I loved the pictures that so beautifully capture the love and friendship between man and dog. I loved not just the full-page colored paintings, but the many small and detailed pencil sketches mixed with the text. There was one picture especially—one of the dog at the bow of the boat—where, I felt that, just the expression on the dog's face was worth the cost of the book.

I also loved the story. Who wouldn't love a story about a lost dog struggling to survive on his own and faithfully waiting for his master to return? But the language, which is supposed to be "free verse" presented an obstacle in my eager rush to totally adore *Snook Alone*. Marilyn Nelson has written some passages that are beautiful in their simplicity such as:

*"In the morning
There were only faint sips of his friend's scent
left for Snook to drink in here and there."*

This language flows. As it does in this delightful passage at the end when what we've all been waiting for (the happy ending) finally comes:

*"Then he jumped and raced in a yapping circle
of pee-dribbling delight."*

But then there are so many unfamiliar words in the text (mostly names of either animal or botanical species; such as pemphis, casuarina; arguisia; scaevola; suriana; cardisoma, carapaces) , that the flow just comes to a halt.

It is by no means an essential purchase, but you may want to own this picture book for older readers, for the many dog lovers your library serves, grades 2-5. (LM)

#12 *Me, Frida*, Novesky, Amy. Illustrated by David Diaz.

Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera move to San Francisco when he is commissioned to paint a mural in 1930. This was the first time Kahlo traveled out of Mexico. Novesky contrasts Diego's excitement with Frida's aversion to her new surroundings. However, as Kahlo begins to explore the city on her own, we see a shift from Kahlo as companion to Kahlo as Creator. The tale culminates with a well-received exhibit of her now famous portrait *Frida and Diego*. This portrait she paints herself considerably smaller than Diego.

The illustrations of David Diaz add a layer of detail that draws the reader in. The pages are bright, ornate, and folksy like Kahlo. There is so much information to be seen and inferences made. As mentioned, Kahlo paints herself considerably smaller than Diego; Diaz, however offers the reader an alternative perspective to the *Frida and Diego* portrait. It is an interesting twist to the tale.

This picture book is a great read aloud for grade K-5 to introduce studies in portraits and perspective, Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. Not recommended as a biographical text. Pair with *Diego: Bigger Than Life* by Carmen T. Bernier Grand, also illustrated by David Diaz. (KG)

#13 *Rain School*. Rumford, James.

It is the first day of school in the country of Chad and Thomas wants to know if he will get a notebook, a pencil, will he learn to read...all good questions, which the older children are reluctant to answer. We soon learn why—when they arrive at the schoolyard...there is no school. But thankfully, there is a smiling teacher who explains that their first lesson is that they will build their school. Thomas learns to make bricks, to build mud walls and mud desks. to gather grass for the roof. Finally the school is complete, and the rest of the learning begins, and continues for nine months. It ends just as the big rains begin. The rains, of course, destroy the mud school--but never the knowledge that has been acquired by the children. Each year the cycle begins anew.

The text is soft and spare, the illustrations glow with a warm golden patina, and yet the message comes through loud and clear – knowledge is precious and permanent, even if the school buildings are not. This is a wonderful glimpse into another country, and another culture. Use it in a Social Studies class on Africa, as an introduction to other cultures, or just as a gentle story about how other people in our world find a way to live and to learn. (LR)

#14 Ubiquitous: Celebrating Nature's Survivors, Sidman, Joyce. Illustrated by Beckie Prange

Ubiquitous: Celebrating Nature's Survivors a collection of 14 exquisite poems written by Joyce Sidman and illustrated by Beckie Prange creators of the Caldecott Honor book *Song of the Water Boatman & Other Pond Poems* delivers another breathtakingly beautiful book of poetry and prose. This title about resilient species that are remarkable for their ability to survive as author Joyce Sidman tells us, “when you consider that 99 percent of all species that have existed are now extinct,” combines a variety of formats of poetry in bound and free verse. Each of the poems is displayed in a sumptuous double spread, with the poem on the left and a comprehensive scientific description of the species on the right side.

The vivid time line at the beginning of the book, visually clarifies the reader’s perception of when species evolved. The glossary in the back of the book was helpful in explaining the scientific vocabulary used in both the poetry and informational text. The author’s note in the back includes children’s books and web sites used to research this title. grade unit on evolution in the science and language arts curriculum.

Although this title is recommended for first through fifth grade, I found the vocabulary and concepts sophisticated and best appreciated by fourth through 7th grade, where it would work as a perfect introduction to a unit on evolution. (ML)

#15 A Sick Day for Amos McGee. Stead, Philip C. Illustrated by Erin E. Stead.

This year’s Caldecott winner *A Sick Day for Amos McGee* written by Philip C. Stead and illustrated by Erin E. Stead received rave reviews from our first grade audience. The story of a kindly old zookeeper going through the routine activities of a normal day at the zoo had the calming soothing effect of a “Mr. Rogers” character unzipping his red sweater.

Philip C. Stead’s message of kindness and friendship is deftly told through pictures of Amos Mc Gee tenderly caring for his animal friends at the zoo and they’re returning the favor when he is sick. Told in few words, this title is just right for a pre-K through first graders. This would make a great read-aloud for a unit on friendship.

A Sick Day for Amos McGee also works perfectly as an introduction lesson for the Caldecott Award, since the illustrations are so unique and appealing. Comparing it to past Caldecott award winners such as David Wiesner’s, *The Three Pigs* and Jerry Pinkney’s *The Lion and the Mouse*, would develop very young students’ imagination and refine their taste with the best in children’s illustrations. (ML)

#16 Interrupting Chicken. Stein, David Ezra.

Papa chicken and his little daughter in their cozy home are creatively painted with bright splashes of color using watercolor, water-soluble crayon, china marker, pen, opaque white ink, and tea. It is bedtime and little chicken reminds Papa that it is also story time. He agrees to read, but reminds her not to interrupt. Predictably, little chick cannot help herself; she warns Hansel and Gretel not to go in the witch's house, cautions Red Riding Hood not to talk to the big bad wolf, and tells Chicken Little that only an acorn was falling. By this time Papa has exhausted his repertoire so he suggests that little chicken tell him a story. Full-page illustrations show a lined notebook with her composition, "Bedtime for Papa." By the time she finishes, Papa is sound asleep! Nursery-aged children through elementary will enjoy this familiar situation – younger ones who like to think of ways to resist bedtime and older children who will appreciate the folktales shown in sepia tones with the little chicken popping up in bright red to interrupt with warnings of danger. (DL)

#17 *Fiesta Babies.* Tafolla, Carmen.

Rollicking rhymes relate the enjoyment an extended family experiences during a Mexican fiesta. Happy preschoolers march in a parade, eat chips dipped in salsa, sing, and dance until they collapse on the ground for a siesta. After their nap, they are ready to continue the celebration at night ending with besos (kisses) and abrazos (hugs) from their parents. Rhymes boldly printed on the left-hand pages accompanied by a simple illustration stand out from the white background. Colorful full-page illustrations on the right are painted in rich acrylics. Children take center stage; they are active participants and obviously love every minute of the special day. Spanish words incorporated into the text are defined in a glossary at the conclusion. This lively little picture book is recommended as a read aloud for nursery school and kindergarten. Children learning about this Mexican celebration may want to have their very own. (DL)

#18 *Dear Primo: A Letter to My Cousin.* Tonatiuh, Duncan.

Dear Primo explores the relationship between two cousins, Carlitos from a farm in Mexico and Charlie from a U.S. city. In the course of a "pen pal" series of letters, the reader sees the parallels and the differences between their lives. As time goes on and information about family life, school, traditions, hopes and dreams is exchanged, the cousins develop a deeper relationship although they've never met. Consequently, what is emphasized here is what binds the cousins rather than sets them apart. The author/illustrator says in a note that he is "both Mexican and American (literally: [he has] two passports), and what [he's] discovered is that despite the apparent differences between these two countries at the end of the day, we are more similar than different." That feeling really comes through here as both cultures are portrayed with equal amounts of joy and sorrow, so that neither is judged superior or inferior.

The "story" is lovely, but what makes this book special is its format and artwork. The book is brimming with color. The illustrations take up every page as the letters, as well as Spanish identifying words are integrated into the pictures. The author also provides a glossary of the words in the back. Duncan Tonatiuh's illustrations are inspired by the Pre-Columbian Art of the Mixtec culture of Southern Mexico. He used these drawings as a sort of jumping-off point, hand drawing his story and then added color and collage effects, digitally. The result is rich and textured.

Dear Primo is a great book for talking about diversity. Use it to introduce a unit on immigration. It could also be used with younger students in your community unit when talking about the differences between city and country life. Use it to introduce the idea of pen-pals or letter writing or use it with kindergarten through Grade 4 just to get across the idea that as the author says "people are people". (LM)

#19 *Grandma's Gift.* Velasquez, Eric.

Although Grandma's Gift uses a picture book format, it deals with sophisticated issues such as the sense of belonging (El Barrio in Spanish Harlem), cooking holiday foods (pasteles, a traditional Puerto Rican Christmas dish) and visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Based on his experience as a child, author/illustrator Eric Velasquez, tells the story of staying with his grandmother during school vacations when his parents were working. He was happy to accompany Grandma when she purchased the ingredients for pasteles and interacted with shopkeepers. Grandma and Eric agreed that if he helped her make the complicated pasteles, she would accompany him to the art museum to complete a school assignment. When they arrived at the museum, Eric could tell that she was out of her comfort zone; there were no Puerto Ricans in sight and no Spanish to be heard. Imagine their surprise and pleasure when the assignment turned out to be viewing a painting of Juan de Pareja about whom Grandma had studied when a young girl in Puerto Rico. An author's note explains that the museum purchased the painting in 1971 "for more than \$5.5 million, which set a new record for paintings at that time." The book concludes with the family enjoying togetherness at a Christmas Eve dinner and Eric receiving the gift of a sketchbook and his first set of colored pencils from his grandmother. The full-page oil paintings express warmth and sensitivity; they are especially well-coordinated since the frame for the painting of Juan de Pareja is shown framing Eric and Grandma on the front cover. This book is a must purchase for libraries serving students with ties to Puerto Rico. (DL)

#20 City Dog, Country Frog. Willems, Mo. Illustrated by Jon J. Muth.

You've just gotta love Mo Willems!! This one, however, is a bit of a departure for him as you will hear.. It is spring; City Dog is set free in the country. He bounds exuberantly off leash "as far and as fast as he could" go. He spots something he has never seen before (Country Frog) sitting on a rock. Frog is waiting for a friend, but says that dog "will do." They play together-Frog teaches Dog frog games. That was spring. Then summer comes and we find the two reunited with Dog teaching Frog dog games. Fall comes and dog bounds toward Frog ready to play, but frog is tired and wants only to sit and reminisce about their past time together. When winter comes Dog is anxious to see his friend again. But Frog is not there. Dog sits alone on the rock. Then spring arrives once more and dog is back on the rock waiting for his friend. Country Chipmunk spots him and although Dog is waiting sadly for Frog, he tells Chipmunk that he will do.

The blurb on the jacket states that "Willems continues to be a master at conveying an amazing amount of emotion...using minimal elements." And the pairing of Jon Muth as illustrator here is brilliant! The seasons of a lifetime are told here with every word carefully chosen so that it really counts. The text is spare the landscapes glorious and expressive. The message is subtle, bittersweet, and poignant. Children and adults will each come away with their own interpretations and each will be richer for having experienced this book--great for those moments when emotions need explaining. Read it together--there is much to talk about and to learn about--friendship and caring, love and life, death and moving on to live again. (LR)

#21 We are in a book. Willems, Mo.

In this latest book in the Elephant and Piggie series, Mo Willems, the author/illustrator manages to do more with less than anybody I can think of. As in other Elephant and Piggie books, Gerald the Elephant and his more extroverted friend, Piggie, appear on an almost bare page. This time, though, the page itself becomes the object of their interest as they realize they are in a book and there is someone—the reader—looking at them. Willems (through Elephant and Piggie) plays with this idea of Gerald and Piggie talking to the reader and the reader is brought in on the joke.

I wasn't 100% sure how this would play with the kids, (I wasn't sure they would get the joke) so I read it first to my pre-kindergarteners and then to my 1st graders. The 4 and 5 year olds liked it as they do all Mo Willems' books. The 1st graders though, adored it. When Piggie tells Gerald he

can make the reader say a word and Piggie makes the reader say “banana” the kids were rolling on the floor laughing. From there the book just keeps getting better and better. I loved the bit they do about the book ending. Gerald, not a real risk-taking elephant wants to know when the book will end, so Piggie lifts up the corner of the book to take a look. It is sublime silliness. Mo Willems characters’ faces are so expressive and his plots, so simple yet so appealing, he really is the Dr. Seuss of this generation. Buy this book for your easy-reader section. It will also make a great read-aloud for the 1st library class. (LM)

#22. *Ole Flamenco.* Ancona, George.

An introduction to the history, culture and music of the flamenco. Many believe that this art form originated in Egypt, later, spreading to North Africa, the Middle East and Europe. Closely associated with the gypsies, the word actually stands for the southern Spanish art form which combines, dance, song and music.

Through photographs the reader follows a brother and sister as they learn about the instruments, dance steps and costumes.

The Spanish glossary and pronunciation charts complete the lesson. This will be popular with music and foreign language teachers. Adding a CD of the music would have been helpful. (MT)

#23 *Nic Bishop: Lizards.* Bishop, Nic

Nic Bishop’s *Lizards* is written and photographed in the same captivating format as his other award winning titles; *Butterflies and Moths*, *Spiders*, and *Frogs*. Librarians know instinctively when each new Nic Bishop title is published, it will be snapped up immediately by students interested in science and animals. Because of the simpler bold contrasting colored sentences included with the fascinating text on each page, it can be read by a child from 2nd through 5th grade. Each single or double page spread shows an enlarged gorgeous photograph of a specific lizard in his habitat, with a clever description of it on the accompanying page. In the back of the book he gives explanations of how he photographed these highly unusual lizards in their habitats. He also includes an index, glossary, a bibliography with more books on lizards and his web site.

This is a great title for introducing a variety of lizards, however there is not enough specific information for report writing. You could team it with *Lizards, Frogs, and Polliwogs : Poems and Paintings* by Douglas Florian, for a science, poetry unit. For another excellent and beautifully illustrated resource on lizards try Margery Facklam’s *Lizards : Weird and Wonderful*. *Nic Bishop’s Lizards* is a must buy for all elementary libraries. (ML)

#24 *Ballet For Martha: Making Appalachin Spring.* Greenberg, Jan and Jordan, Sandra. Illustrated by Brian Floca.

This book tells the story of the collaboration of Martha Graham, Aaron Copeland and Isamu Noguci, to craft one of America’s most famous, enduring and accomplished ballets, Appalachian Spring; the simple story of a wedding day celebration of a PA farmer and his bride; created for eight dancers and thirteen chamber instruments. It was first performed at the Library of Congress in 1944.

A strong sense of the determination of all three artists is paramount in the book. Graham’s unique sense of movement, Copeland’s search for the right melody and Noguchi’s work in creating the set, are presented in a behind the scenes story that is well researched, complete and captivating. Floca’s ink and watercolor artwork capture the setting, the choreographed gestures of the dancers, and the mood of the musical piece. Just as three artists came together to create Appalachia Spring, so, too, have the three collaborators on this book come together to create a stunning tribute.

Extensive back matter complete with photographs round out this piece of dramatic research. Use it as it stands; put it in the hands of a good movement teacher or music teacher, an art teacher, a young sculptor. It is a book that may need to be introduced and “sold” to its audience. But, sell it we should. (LR)

#25 *Turtle In Paradise* Holm, Jennifer.

Turtle is the eleven year-old narrator of this middle grade novel based on tales Holm’s grandmother told after immigrating to Key West at the turn of the last century. Turtle is a girl with gumption. She is sent off to live with relatives in Key West, FL (who have no idea she is coming) because her mother has landed a housekeeping job in NJ where children are not welcome. Her mother has painted a picture for Turtle of Key West as paradise, but Turtle’s initial reaction is more realistic, she thinks the place is a dump and she is not wrong. The year is 1935; the Depression has a deep hold on the south. Turtle’s cousins (all boys with nick names more unusual than her own) are not welcoming. But Turtle wins a place for herself in the family with her positive outlook and lots of good humor. She begins taking lunch to a cantankerous old lady who turns out to be her grandmother (whom she thought was dead). She finds a treasure map and convinces the boys to go on the treasure hunt with her. They weather a frightening, historical hurricane and actually manage to find the treasure. Turtle loses her share of it to her mother’s no-good boyfriend, but ends up with a treasure more valuable—a place in a real family, complete with her own mother.

The novel includes people and events from the historical time in which it is set. Turtle compares herself to Little Orphan Annie, and as well makes many references to Shirley Temple. Much of this will be unfamiliar to today’s young reader, but this in no way takes away from the story.

The book could be well used in a study of the period—it would make a great read aloud in History class! There is an author’s note with photos of Key West in the 30’s, (including some of those boy cousins). There are four additional titles cited including Freeman’s *Children of the Great Depression*, and *Storm of the Century: The Labor Day Hurricane of 1935* by Willie Drye. Websites are listed. Turtle’s voice is real, and despite the history between them, kids today will relate to her. (LR)

#26 *Kakapo Rescue: Saving the World’s Strangest Parrot*. Scientists in the Field Series Montgomery, Sy. Photographs by Nic Bishop.

.Fluffy, cute, sweet smelling and loves humans, no, not the Easter Bunny—it’s a Kakapo. The kakapo, a nocturnal flightless bird thrived in New Zealand until the introduction of mammals by the Maoris and later, European explorers. By the 1950’s many believed they had become extinct. During the 1970’s several isolated colonies were located and efforts to save the loveable birds had begun.

Follow a team of scientists as they try to save a small group inhabiting Codfish Island, off the coast of New Zealand. Photographs by Nic Bishop add clarity and human interest to the story.

For elementary school, it is perfect as a read aloud in small sections. Middle and high school libraries will find it useful for their endangered species collection. Follow the progress of the team on their website

<http://www.kakaporecovery.org.nz/index.php> (MT)

#27 *Black Elk’s Vision: A Lakota Story*. Nelson, S. D.

Black Elk’s Vision is a biography of a Lakota Sioux whose life was symbolic of the changes experienced by Native Americans on the Western plains after the Civil War. In first person, Black Elk tells how his mother warned him about the Wha-shi-choos who “had white faces and had

started terrible battles.” Black Elk almost forgot about the threat as he learned to ride horses and follow the buffalo with his family and fellow villagers. A mystical element is introduced when at four years of age, he began hearing spirit voices which led to his understanding of the Circle of Life. However, these visions which he shared with his people were not enough to protect them against the arrival of railroads and the slaughter of buffalo. Students will find it hard to believe that Black Elk’s life was to change so drastically. Even though the Indians won the Battle of Little Bighorn after they were attacked by Custer and his soldiers, they soon lost their food source and were forced on reservations. Then Black Elk, Sitting Bull, and others accepted Buffalo Bill’s offer to join his Wild West show for three years even traveling to Europe. However, when they returned to their families on the reservations, survival was difficult. Black Elk led ceremonial dances to try to resurrect their traditional ways, but the Indians were attacked by soldiers at Wounded Knee which was their final defeat. An author’s note and timeline furnish equally interesting information including the fact that Black Elk was married twice, had three children with each wife, and died in 1950 at the age of eighty-seven. The author, S. D. Nelson, a Dakota Sioux, is well-qualified to write and illustrate this account which offers a unique perspective from a Native American’s point of view. The full-page stylized acrylic paintings counter the realism of some of the photographs; depictions of dead buffalo and frozen Indian corpses ready for burial after the Battle of Wounded Knee may be upsetting for some children to view. The book is well-designed; end papers have a map of the north central plains showing important sites, edges of pages are decorated with Lakota geometric designs, and photos, captions, drawings, and vision statements printed in red are well-placed on sepia-colored paper with brown shading. The descriptions of spiritual experiences, and extraordinary span of Black Elk’s experiences from life in a tipi on the prairie and well-known battles to Wild West shows and final life on a reservation will best be understood and appreciated by students in upper elementary and middle school. (DL)

#28 *The Dreamer*. Ryan, Pam Munoz Illustrated by Peter Sis.

The Dreamer is written by Pam Munoz Ryan and illustrated by Peter Sis. It is based on the childhood of Chilean born Nobel Laureate Pablo Neruda, who received the Prize for Literature in 1971. Our protagonist, Neftali, lives in Temuco, Chile. While the setting is distant, his experiences are familiar. He wins the reader over with his imagination and spirit. Although he is weak in stature, his passion for poetry and deep connection with the world he inhabits is awe-inspiring.

This is an excellent story, highly recommended for grades 5- up. The text shows the fluidity of poetry and prose. This is an excellent work of historical fiction. Munoz Ryan, offers the reader a glimpse into the research she conducted to write the novel. In the authors note we learn that she pored over hundreds of Neruda’s letters, poetry, diaries, and pictures, to get a complete picture of her protagonist. As an inspirational or instructional text the reader will gain insight into a creative process that values, observation, research, perseverance, and imagination. (KG)

#29 *Meanwhile*. Shiga, Jason.

Shiga, who has a mathematics background and is a cartoonist, has created a masterpiece by combining a “choose-your-own-adventure” with a graphic novel. However, it goes far beyond either of those. What begins with the choice of a chocolate or vanilla ice cream cone turns into an almost never-ending saga where children (and adults—believe me, adults will be sucked into this as well) can travel through time, exterminate all living things, and read minds over and over again in a multitude of configurations. There are 3,856 possible variations. The reader follows a series of tubes to panels, makes a choice, follows that tube and so on; often to tabs that stick out from the book which then lead to a completely new page. The negatives? The tubes can be confusing to navigate at first, especially at the tab level; and although the pages are plastic the tabs could, with use, become raggedy. If I could compare Meanwhile to another book I would, but it really is one-of-a-kind. As for the grade 4-6

recommendation, I would say that the fourth is correct, but this book extends well beyond sixth grade far into adulthood.

<http://www.shigabooks.com/interactive/meanwhile/01.html>

(JT)

#30 *Dark Emperor and Other Poems of the Night*. Sidman, Joyce. Illustrated by Rick Allen.

Dark Emperor is a poetic celebration of the “wild enchanted park” that is the forest at night. 12 poems pay tribute the living creatures “who crawl and creep, who buzz and chirp and hoot and peep.” Joyce Sidman, award-winning poet of “Red Sings from Treetops,” (a book I raved about at this conference last year) has created another fabulous non-fiction book for children, although this one is very different from the other. Teaming up with illustrator, Rick Allen, the book is a masterful blend of poetry and science. Each of the poems sits on the left-hand side of a generous two-page spread. On the right is a beautifully mysterious linoleum-cut illustration plus several paragraphs of prose about the subject of the poem. The illustrations remind me of the hidden pictures you find in “Highlights Magazine,” where you’re invited to find the animals hidden within. The more you look the more you find, and if you look hard enough, details that make the creatures unique are revealed. The prose pieces give the kind of amazing animal facts you’d find in a really well-done “PBS-Nova” or “Wild Kingdom” episode, the kind of facts that kids will latch onto and want to tell adults about. Who knew that the night-spider had six spinnerets inside its abdomen that spin 6 different kinds of silk, some strong, some silky? Or, that “red eft” are actually the land-dwelling stage of the red-spotted newt. Newts are born in the water and, after two to four years as a land-roving eft, fade to an olive green color, return to the water, and grow gills once again.” This is fascinating stuff.

I enjoyed reading the poem, then looking at the picture, reading the factual info and then going back and reading the poem again. Though the poems could stand on their own, it’s incredible how much more interesting and meaningful the poetry becomes.

This book belongs in any library that serves students grades 2 through 6 with one caveat. Please don’t hide it in the 811s only to bring out in April for National Poetry Month. Make sure all the classroom teachers, and especially the science teacher sees it, as well. (LM)

#31 *Mirror Mirror: A Book of Reversible Verse*. Singer, Marilyn. Illustrated by Josee Masse.

Mirror, Mirror is very clever. Based on fairy tales, what is truly awesome about these poems is their format, called “reversible verse” or “reversos”. Each page presents a pair of poems which are a kind of mirror image of each other; that is the poems have identical words if you read the first from top to bottom and the second from bottom to top. As the author says in an endnote, “the form is especially appropriate for telling two sides of one story.”

Reading the poems, side by side may reveal differences between the characters’ points of view as is the case in “Bears in the News”, based on Goldilocks and the 3 Bears, where we have dueling newspaper headlines;

“Asleep in Cub’s Bed, Blonde Startled by Bears”

versus

“Bears Startled by Blonde Asleep in Cub’s Bed”

or in the poem, “In the Hood” in which read one way, we hear the voice of Little Red Riding Hood; read the other way, we hear the Big Bad Wolf. A pair of reversos may show a character’s inner conflict, such as in the case of “Cinderella’s Double Life” or exemplify the importance of a positive attitude as is the case in “The Doubtful Duckling.”

***“Someday I’ll turn into a swan.
No way I’ll stay an ugly duckling,
Stubby and gray.
Plain to see—
look at me
A beauty I’ll be.”***

versus

***“A beauty I’ll be?
Look at me
plain to see,
stubby and gray.
An ugly duckling
I’ll stay.
No way
I’ll turn into a swan
someday.”***

Both the meaning and the duality of the poems is further elucidated by the split-frame illustrations facing each pair. These full-page illustrations are stunningly bold and beautifully complement the text.

Besides just reading this book to appreciate the sheer genius of Marilyn Singer, I can see it being used in the classroom in a number of different ways. As part of a poetry unit, you could have your kids try to write their own reverso. (The author, helpfully, provides a copy of her first very simple one about her cat that kids could model). You could certainly use this in a fairy tale unit to bring another dimension to the stories. You could use it to very concretely demonstrate the importance of both punctuation and syntax.

This book is highly recommended for libraries serving children in grades 3 through 8. (LM)

#32 *One Crazy Summer.* Williams-Garcia, Rita.

1968. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy are assassinated. President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act, and J. Edgar Hoover states that the Black Panther Party is, “...the greatest threat to the internal security of the country.” This is a book that is about family and self-discovery. It just happens to be seamlessly woven into the setting of Oakland, CA two months after the police killed eighteen-year-old Bobby Hutton. Although the Black Panther Party is an aspect of this book, Williams-Garcia handles information pertaining to the BPP with a deft hand. She allows the reader to draw conclusions and primarily provides a springboard to those who might wish to look into any of the issues or topics in further detail on their own.

If a teacher was looking for a book to focus on the literary elements of character or conflict, this would be the ticket. Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern, the three sisters in this novel, are brought to life more by their personalities than their appearances. Williams-Garcia's writing expertly conveys their innocence, wit, and their attempts to make sense of conflicting advice from adults as well as the sisters' hesitance toward yet longing for love from the mother that left them as babies. Their mother, in turn, is an artful depiction of the often contrasting aspects of all people. All in all, this is a sweet story where Williams-Garcia lets us into a slice of time in the life of a family and allows us to become part of the family dynamics. (JT)

#33 *Borrowed Names-: Poems About Laura Ingalls Wilder, Madam C.J. Walker, Marie Curie And Their Daughters.* Atkins, Jeannine.

The book is composed of poetic cameo portraits of three famous women and their daughters. A writer, an entrepreneur and a scientist each struggling to achieve success in their own field. How did their struggles and triumphs affect their mother- daughter relationship? Knowing more about the background of these women would have been helpful in understanding the poems.

The unique format is just as instructive as the contents. It would be a great technique to use for a biography book report. (MT)

#34 *Ship Breaker.* Bacigalupi, Paolo.

This dystopian post-apocalyptic novel is fast-paced and full of action, and as a word to the wise, also full of "bad" words. However, it is also much more than that. While The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins and Life As We Knew It by Susan Beth Pfeffer offer the same basic type of unhinged society, Ship Breaker, in many ways, depicts a scarier and more realistic fall from grace.

Older readers will easily recognize the social commentary on the misuse of natural resources, and the incredible discrepancy between the lives of the characters living in grim poverty compared to the few wealthy and the resulting moral decline of both groups based on their desire to either climb out of their situation or to keep others in their place. However, Bacigalupi is neither preachy nor recriminatory and this makes the setting, characters, and their actions all the more understandable. And while the novel is quite violent, it is this recognition and understanding of how we could easily get from here to the world in the novel that truly makes it frightening, riveting, wonderful, shocking, and unforgettable.

Although the recommended grade level for this novel begins at 7th grade, I would say that it would need to be a mature 7th grader that could truly appreciate all that it has to offer. Late 8th grade would be the best beginning audience. A second book, entitled The Drowned Cities, is slated to be published in 2011. (JT)

#35 *They Called Themselves the KKK: the Birth of an American Terrorist Group.* Bartoletti, Susan Campbell

Volumes have been written about the American Civil War and its causes, but the post war or Reconstruction period has never received the attention it deserves. How was reconciliation to be achieved? Many southerners anxious to maintain prewar conditions felt the Ku Klux Klan was the answer. Originally, a social club, it soon became a source of power. The author traces the history of the Klan and its effect on the American people both black and white, free men and slave. Illustrations, engravings, news articles and first person narratives enhance the text. The bibliography, chapter notes and additional annotations at the end are excellent sources. A "requirement" for every American Civil War collection. (MT)

#36 *A Time of Miracles.* Bondoux, Anne Laure.

This piece of historical fiction covers a time period that has been somewhat lacking for this age group. Anne-Laure Bondoux, author of the award winning The Killer's Tears, has written another poignant tale about a child's resilience in the midst of extreme hardship. This tale follows the excruciating journey of Koumail, as he grows from childhood to young adulthood, and his guardian as they make their way toward freedom from behind the Iron Curtain. Bondoux has written with tenderness so palpable that every misstep and heartache that Koumail endures, the reader does as well. While some background on the fall of the Soviet Union will enhance the reading of this story, readers who do not have that background knowledge will not suffer for the lack of it and may, quite possibly, become interested in finding out additional information. Bondoux includes a map of the key places along Koumail's journey. This could be a hard sell, but some students will cherish this poignant tale. (JT)

#37 *The Firefly Letters: A Suffragettes Journey to Cuba*. Engle, Margarita.

The novel is based on the travel correspondence of Frederika Bremer, a Norwegian-born "pioneer of women's rights" who visited Cuba in the 1851. Through free-verse poetry, slavery, gender, and class are explored. We experience these concepts through the lens of four main characters, Celia (sold into slavery becomes a valuable translator and companion of Bremer); Elena (an upper class girl who is confined to the grounds of her villa); Beni (Celia's husband, also a slave and valuable horseman); and Frederika Bremer, who exemplifies freedom, mobility, and progress. In a similar vein as *The Dreamer*, we understand the tremendous responsibility writers have to speak for others who cannot speak for themselves.

This book is a highly recommended work of historical fiction. Grades 4- up will enjoy this book. In addition to being an instructional text in creative writing and poetry, the historical note provides the reader with insight into the research and writing process. This text pairs well with African Diaspora, slavery, Cuba, and female reformers curriculum. Students creating works of historical fiction will find this novel to be edifying. (KG)

#38 *90 Miles to Havana*. Flores-Galbis, Enrique.

Described as a "Cuban coming of age story", this adventure follows Julian and his brother after they flee Cuba with thousands of other children, in what is known as "Operation Pedro Pan". Upon arrival in the United States they are placed in an understaffed Catholic orphanage for refugee children.

Julian is a tenacious character and experiences growth and perspective during this journey. He becomes a leader among his peers when he and other children stage a revolution to overthrow the "bully/dictator", Caballa. In organizing the group that will remove Caballa from power, they address fundamental principles of democracy and dictatorship.

This book is recommended for grades 4-7 as an Adventure genre. Concepts such as refugee, revolution, dictator, democracy, and constitution are explored with clarity.

Unfortunately there is not a note from the author to shed light on the claims and experiences in the book. Some reviews online suggest that this novel is based on the author's personal experience. While others suggest that there are historical inaccuracies, and while the Pedro Pan experiences vary, this book's depiction of Pedro Pan orphanages is untenable. (KG)

#39 *Lafayette and the American Revolution*. Freedman, Russell,

Even though the title Lafayette and the American Revolution suggests a specific period, this book, highly recommended as a social studies reference, is actually a biography of a courageous Frenchman who contributed greatly to our country's fight for independence. He could have led a comfortable life at the court of King Louis XVI after receiving the traditional military training expected for a young man of noble birth and wealth. However, Gilbert de Lafayette's thinking and subsequent actions were influenced by philosophers such as England's John Locke and France's own Voltaire who "challenged the divine right of kings, called for popular rule, and proclaimed the rights of man." Today's students will be surprised to learn that an arrangement was made for sixteen-year-old Lafayette to marry a bride of fourteen. After meeting Silas Deane, a representative of the rebellious American colonists seeking French aid, Lafayette chose to leave his young wife and baby daughter to sail to America even against the wishes of his father-in-law and the king. After an arduous journey, Lafayette was initially rejected by members of Congress because of his youth, but they reconsidered when they realized his status and potential worth. Due to a prior agreement with Deane, nineteen-year-old Lafayette entered the Continental Army as major general serving without pay and never having fought in a battle. His request to serve directly under General Washington was approved and over the next four years, they became as close as father and son. Lafayette commanded his troops bravely in a variety of confrontations concluding with an instrumental role in the British surrender at Yorktown. Lafayette's bravery, commitment, and sense of humor are made evident by quotes from letters and his memoir skillfully interwoven in the narrative. An oversized format is needed to accommodate the many bordered paintings and engravings which elegantly illustrate the text. A timeline is included to help students as well as source notes, a bibliography, and index. (DL)

#40 *Departure Time*. Matti, Truus. Translated by Nancy Forest-Flier.

Translated from Dutch, this novel is a mystery/fantasy tale. The reader follows two stories of a two girls, one in a surrealist space and the other in what seems to be a harsh reality. It is puzzling whether these worlds will converge, however there are clues along the way. It seems that the reader is on the journey with the young female protagonist to help her make sense out of her confusion, life, and profound loss.

Recommended for grades 5-8 students may find this to be a challenging read at first. (KG)

#41 *Yummy: The Last Days of a Southside Shorty*. Neri, Greg. Illustrated by Randy DuBurke.

This graphic novel is based on the real life story of Robert "Yummy" Sandifer, who in 1994, among other things: turned eleven years old, lived in the Roseland section of Chicago, made the cover of *Time* magazine, joined a gang, shot and killed fourteen-year-old Shavon Dean, and was then killed by his fellow gang members for being a liability. Neri's skilled writing presents a jarring yet highly objective look at the events leading up to Yummy's own death. Young readers, who tend to see things as black or white, will be surprised to find themselves struggling, and coming to terms, with the conflicting notion that people are not necessarily "all bad" or "all good." On his website, Neri states that he writes, "...provocative, edgy stories for reluctant readers, especially urban boys." This may be his intended audience, but it will reach, and touch, a much broader range. While urban boys may be able to relate to aspects of this dramatization of Yummy's life and death, suburban boys and girls will learn something about how other children live. The graphic novel format only adds to its appeal. In addition, the stark, black and white drawings evoke almost as much emotion as the text itself. Reluctant readers and those who profess to not read nonfiction will find this a book that is impossible to put down. A must have. (JT)

#42 *As Easy as Falling Off the Face of the Earth*. Perkins, Lynne Rae.

Ry is a sixteen-year-old headed to summer camp when he opens a letter that he finds in his backpack telling him that camp has been canceled. This is just the first of a long series of over-the-top improbable mishaps that affect Ry and his attempts to return home when he finds himself in the stranded in the middle of nowhere, aka the state of Montana. What starts out as a seemingly amusing premise quickly grows tired. The best, and most amusing part of the novel is a side story, in cartoon format, that is interspersed throughout the book. This aspect of the novel involves Ry's dogs that go on an adventure of their own. So, unless you have huge Perkins fans in your school I would give this one a pass and stick instead with Gordon Korman's No More Dead Dogs, and Son of the Mob, Gary Paulsen's How Angel Peterson got his Name and Other Outrageous Tales About Extreme Sports and the Schernoff Discoveries, and Richard Peck's A Long Way From Chicago. (JT)

#43 *Heart of a Samurai*. Preus, Margi.

Carefully chosen quotes from the Bushido or Samurai Creed which introduce each of the five parts of this book, "The Unknown, The Barbarians, The New World, Returning, and Home" aptly describe Manjiro Nakahama who at sixteen years of age is thought to be the first person from Japan to enter the United States. It is no wonder that his expressed ambition to become a samurai is ridiculed by his four fellow fishermen when they became stranded on Bird Island after a bad storm. They were on the verge of starvation when rescued by Captain Whitfield's whaling ship. To their surprise, they were treated with kindness and given tasks including the dangerous capture and processing of whales. The other Japanese fishermen chose to stay in Hawaii where the ship briefly docked, but Manjiro who had endeared himself to Captain Whitfield due to his curiosity and willingness to learn was invited to continue the journey. Their bond strengthened so that by the time they landed in New Bedford, Massachusetts on May 7, 1843, the captain enrolled Manjiro in the local school and later arranged an apprenticeship for him. Manjiro's detailed attempts to cope with cultural differences such as language, clothing, food, and housing will be understood and appreciated by today's young people. Manjiro also experienced discrimination; the treatment he received at the hands of the local bully is not unlike some current situations. Even though the penalty for leaving Japan was death, Manjiro did return after being away for almost twelve years. He was reunited with his family, but was soon summoned to the central government to furnish pertinent information about America – and was "appointed as a samurai to the shogun." This is a complete and well-integrated novel; forty-one chapters describe the exciting adventures of Manjiro as a young adult; an epilogue and historical notes provide fascinating information about his later life. There is also an extensive glossary and suggested readings about Manjiro, whaling, the gold rush, samurai, and Japan. Black and white illustrations including many drawings by Manjiro show how skillful he was in observing his surroundings. Heart of a Samurai is highly recommended as supplemental reading for this period of United States history especially pertaining to relations with Japan. (DL)

#44 *Fever Crumb*. Reeve, Philip.

Reeve has outdone himself with this prequel to his Hungry City's Chronicles. *Fever Crumb* is a strong, fourteen-year-old, female protagonist who, like Katniss Everdeen from The Hunger Games, will appeal to boys as well as girls. Students will enjoy feeling as though they have a leg up on *Fever* and the other engineers in this futuristic novel as they try to determine what old pieces of machinery were and for what they were used. This book has something for almost everyone and, as *Fever* works through the visions and memories that are not her own while trying to avoid being captured by a variety of really nasty characters, readers will never have a dull moment. A science fiction/fantasy genre piece that reads like a classic will have students who have not read any of Reeve's work clambering for other books of his or ones of a similar nature, such as Incarceron by Catherine Fisher. (JT)

#45 *The Ninth Ward*. Rhodes, Jewell Parker.

This book memorializes the devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina and the failure of the levees. The Ninth Ward is home to the female protagonists, 12 year old Laneshia and her adopted grandmother, Mama Ya Ya. They both have a connection to the supernatural world. Mama Ya Ya has visions, while Laneshia can see the dead.

This is a story of personal triumph, adversity, and perseverance. Laneshia is a strong character with many admirable qualities. Despite her socio-economic status and peculiar individuality, she maintains a positive mental attitude.

This Realistic Fiction / Adventure novel is recommended for grades 4 – 8. Encourage students to research media coverage of Hurricane Katrina and it's aftermath in the Ninth Ward. (KG)

#46. *Revolver*. Sedgwick, Marcus.

A chilling, late 19th century tale of mystery and terror in the Arctic wilderness, worthy of Alfred Hitchcock. Shortly after his father's accidental death, 14 year old Craig is threatened by the appearance of a huge, grizzly, old miner. He knows nothing about the hidden gold, the man is demanding. Ultimately, he finds a unique way of solving the dilemma.

While reminiscent of Jack London, Gary Paulsen, Edgar Allen Poe and Robert Service, the underlying moral, religious and philosophical issues are timeless. The point: "There is always a third option in life-it just that sometimes it takes a little while to find it." (MT)

#47 *After Ever After*. Sonnenblick, Jordan.

After Ever After is Jordan Sonnenblick's deeply satisfying sequel to *Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pie*. It is written from the point of view of 8th grade cancer survivor Jeffrey Alper, who negotiates the challenges of his final year in Middle School, with humor and angst. Inflicted with leukemia as a five year old, Jeffrey continues to suffer from the side effects of the chemotherapy and radiation treatments that saved his life, but leaves him with serious learning and physical disabilities.

Written in a variety of formats, dialogue, journal entries, e-mails and IMs, *After Ever After* speaks in the vernacular middle school kids use when communicating amongst one another. It is a powerful read, both alone and as a sequel. The subject of cancer rarely included in YA literature is deftly covered, yet as only part of an array of other subjects Jeffrey focuses on, such as family, academic achievement, an important friendship and a first time girl friend. These are all exciting topics skillfully depicted that will appeal to readers 6th -9th grade. (ML)

#48 *Nothing*. Teller, Janne. Translated by Martin Aitken.

This novel is disturbing. A group of seventh grade students are determined to find "meaning" when a fellow classmate asserts, "Nothing matters". Their quest for meaning evolves. It begins with an informal gathering in a sawmill and the creation of the "Pile of Meaning". Innocuous items are offered to the pile, but it quickly gets out of hand. Be advised that there is some material that many readers may find objectionable, such as grave robbing, dismemberment, rape, desecration of the cross, and murder without consequence.

This book is not recommended for this age group and may not be suitable in many high schools. (KG)

#49 *Moon Over Manifest*. Vanderpool, Clare.

Moon Over Manifest is mostly just a really good story. Readers will experience a wide range of emotions from humor to sorrow as the tightly woven and multi-layered story, filled with mystery, intrigue, murder, spies, orphans, friendship, and hope, quietly unfolds. One of the most amazing things, to me, was how every little detail in the story, from an unusual fence that Abilene sees to the hobo camps near Manifest, all tie into the tale and are more than meet the eye.

Stories that take place in different time periods sometimes cause young readers some difficulty. Moon Over Manifest switches back and forth between 1936, however, the date shifts are seamless and clever. The twenty year time difference is told through old newspaper articles and the stories of one of the town's residents. The majority of the characters are well-drawn and unique, but believable. The exception is two friends that Abilene makes in manifest who definitely have their moments, but could be more fully developed.

This year's Newbery winner, like most Newbery winners, has its share of lovers and haters. You will buy it because it is the Newbery winner, but I believe that although it is not a book that will fly off of the shelf on its own, it will have an audience. (JT)

#50. Countdown. Book I of the Sixties Trilogy. Wiles, Deborah.

Eleven year-old Franny Chapman has problems in school and at home. She had a fight with her best friend, the teacher ignores her, big sister Jo Ellen is distant, little brother Drew is annoying, mom is preoccupied, dad is away and Uncle Otts insists they need to build a bomb shelter. As if that isn't enough, the United States and Russia are arguing over some missiles in Cuba, there may be a nuclear war and the world is ending tomorrow.

Welcome to the 1960's and "those thrilling days of yesteryear". A personal coming of age story set against a tumultuous time in American history. This "documentary novel" is reminiscent of the technique used in the movie "Forrest Gump". Students in middle school unfamiliar with the historical background, maybe unable to fully appreciate the situation.

However, this would be perfect required reading for students studying that time period. (MT)

Reviewer Key:

DL-Diana Lamey

ML-Martha Lambertsen

LM-Linda Mullen

MT-Martha Trzepacz

LR-Lynne Rudolph

KG-Kelly Grimmett

JT-Julie Tomer

W3, Thursday, April 28, 2011: Linda Mullen, Julie Tomer and the Best of the Best Committee:
KELLY GRIMMETT, MARTHA LAMBERTSEN, DIANA LAMEY, LYNNE RUDOLPH AND MARTHA TRZEPACZ

Preschool to Grade 3 Books

	Author	Illustrator	Title	Awards (see key)	Grades	Publisher	type
1	Brown, Anthony		Me and You	FAN: SLJ	PreS-2	Farrar	pb
2	DiCamillo, Kate and McGhee, Alison	Fucile, Tony	Bink and Gollie	TSGA; NOT	K-3	Candlewick Press	F
3	Fleming, Candace	Karas, G. Brian	Clever Jack Takes the Cake	SLJ; B List	K-3	Random	pb
4	Graham, Bob		April and Esme, Tooth Fairies	FAN; NOT	PreS-2	Candlewick Press	pb
5	Hill, Laban Carrick	Collier, Brian	Dave the Potter	CH; NOT; CSKIA	K-4	Little, Brown	B
6	Jenkins, Steve and Page, Robin		How to Clean a Hippopotamus	B Links; NOT	K-3	Houghton- Mifflin	pb
7	Khan, Rukhsana		Big Red Lollipop	B List; NOT	PreS-2	Viking	pb
8	Lin, Grace		Ling & Ting: Not Exactly the Same	TSGAH; FAN; B List; NOT	1-2	Little, Brown	pb

9	Lobel, Anita		Nini Lost and Found	FAN; B List	PreS-1	Knopf	pb
10	Mavor, Salley (illus.)		Pocketful of Posies: A Treasury of Nursery Rhymes	FAN; NOT	PreS-1	Houghton	398
11	Nelson, Marilyn	Ering, Timothy Basil	Snook Alone	SLJ; B List	K-4	Candlewick Press	pb
12	Novesky, Amy	Diaz, David	Me Frida	PBIH; NOT	1-3	Abrams Books for Young Readers	pb; B
13	Rumford, James		Rain School	B Links; B List	PreS-2	Houghton	pb
14	Sidman, Joyce	Prange, Beckie	Ubiquitous	B Links; NOT	1-6	Houghton-Mifflin Books for Children	Poetry
15	Stead, Phillip C.	Stead, Erin E.	Sick Day for Amos McGee	CA; NOT	K-2	Roaring Book Press	pb
16	Stein, David Ezra	Stein, David Ezra	Interrupting Chicken	CH; NOT	PreS-3	Candlewick Press	pb
17	Tafolla, Carmen	Cordova, Amy	Fiesta Babies	PBIH; NOT	PreS-K	Tricycle Press	pb
18	Tonatiuh, Duncan	Tonatiuh, Duncan	Dear Primo: A Letter to My Cousin	PBIH; NOT	K-3	Abrams Books for Young Readers	pb

19	Velasquez, Eric	Velasquez, Eric	Grandma's Gift	PBI; NOT	K-3	Walker Publishing Co.	pb
20	Willems, Mo	Muth, Jon J.	City Dog, Country Frog	B List; NOT	PreS-2	Disney Press	pb
21	Willems, Mo		We are in a Book	TSGAH; NOT	PreS-2	Hyperion Books for Children	pb

Intermediate Books (Grades 3-6)

	Author	Illustrator	Title	Awards (see key)	Grades	Publisher	type
22	Ancona, George		Ole! Flamenco	PBAH; NOT	3-5	Lee & Low Books	NF
23	Bishop, Nic		Nic Bishop Lizards	B Links; B List; NOT	2-5	Scholastic Press	NF
24	Greenberg, Jan and Jordan, Sandra	Floca, Brian	Ballet for Martha: Making Appalachian Spring	SIBH; FAN; B Links; B List; NOT	2-4	Roaring Book Press	NF
25	Holm, Jennifer L.		Turtle in paradise	NH; B List; NOT	4-6	Random House	F
26	Montgomery, Sy	photographs by Nic Bishop	Kakapo Rescue: Saving the World's Strangest Parrot	SIB; FAN; Blinks; B List; NOT	4-7	Houghton-Mifflin Books for Children	NF

27	Nelson, S. D.		Black Elk's Vision	B Links; NOT	2-6	Abrams Books for Young Readers	B
28	Ryan, Pam Munoz	Sis, Peter	The Dreamer	PBA; FAN; B List; NOT	4-8	Scholastic Press	F
29	Shiga, Jason		Meanwhile	B List; NOT	4-9	Amulet Books	graphic
30	Sidman, Joyce	Allen, Rick	Dark Emperor and other poems of the night	NH; FAN; B List; NOT	3-6	Houghton- Mifflin Books for Children	Poetry
31	Singer, Marilyn	Masse, Josee	Mirror Mirror: A Book of Reversible Verse	FAN; Blinks; B List; NOT	2-5	Dutton	Poetry; pb
32	Williams-Garcia		One crazy summer	NH; FAN; B List; NOT	4-7	Amistad	F

Middle School Books (Grades 6 and up)

	Author	Illustrator	Title	Awards (see key)	Grades	Publisher	type
33	Atkins, Jeannine		Borrowed Names	B Links; B List	6-9	Holt	Poetry
34	Bacigalupi, Paolo		Ship Breaker	Printz; NOT	7-12	Little, Brown	F

35	Bartoletti, Susan Campbell		They Called Themselves the KKK	FAN; B Links; NOT	7-12	Houghton	NF
36	Bondoux, Anne-Laure	translated by Y. Maudet	Time of Miracles	MLBA; NOT	7-10	Delacorte Press	F
37	Engle, Margarita		The Firefly Letters: A Suffragette's Journey to Cuba	PBAH; NOT	6-12	Henry Holt and Co.	F; Poetry
38	Flores-Galbis, Enrique		90 Miles to Havana	PBAH; NOT	5-8	Roaring Book Press	F
39	Freedman, Russell		Lafayette and the American Revolution	SIBH; B Links; B List; NOT	6-9	Holiday House	NF
40	Matti, Truus	translated by Nancy Forest-Flier	Departure Time	MLBHA; NOT	5-8	Namelos	F
41	Neri, Greg	DuBurke, Randy	Yummy: The Last Days of a Southside Shorty	NOT; CSKAH	7-12	Lee and Low	NF
42	Perkins, Lynne Rae		As Easy as Falling Off the Face of the Earth	FAN; B List	8-12	Greenwillow	F
43	Preus, Margi		Heart of a samurai	NH; B Links; B List; NOT	7-11	Amulet Books	F
44	Reeve, Phillip		Fever Crumb	B List; NOT	6-9	Scholastic Press	F

45	Rhodes, Jewell Parker		Ninth Ward	NOT; CSKAH	5-8	Little, Brown	F
46	Sedgwick, Marcus		Revolver	FAN; PrintzH	7-10	Roaring Book Press	F
47	Sonnenblick, Jordan		After Ever After	B List; SFBA	5-8	Scholastic Press	F
48	Teller, Janne	translated by Martin Aitken	Nothing	MLBHA; B List; NOT; PrintzH	7-12	Atheneum Books for Young Readers	F
49	Vanderpool, Clare		Moon over manifest	NA; NOT	5-8	Delacorte Press	F
50	Wiles, Deborah		Countdown	B Links; B List; NOT	5-7	Scholastic Press	F